

Decision Record and Finding of No Significant Impact
for the
Resource Management Plan and Plan Amendment
Sundance Lodge area

Sundance Lodge and Four Dances Area
Resource Management Plan
Environmental Assessment/Amendment
for the
Billings Resource Management Plan

EA Number: MT-010-0-39

Prepared by:
Bureau of Land Management
Billings Field Office
Billings Montana

Introduction

The Bureau of Land Management proposed to create and implement resource management direction and guidance for the recently acquired land known as Sundance Lodge.

The Billings Resource Management Plan (RMP/EIS) was completed in 1984 and does not contain guidance for the Sundance Lodge area.

Proposed desired outcomes, and allowable uses/ actions to achieve those outcomes, are described in detail as Alternative C of the Sundance Lodge and Four Dances Resource Management Plan Environmental Assessment/ Amendment (EA Number MT 010-0-39).

Decision

I have decided to approve the proposed resource management plan for the Sundance Lodge area, described as the Preferred Alternative (Alternative C) in the Sundance Lodge/Four Dances Environmental Assessment/Plan Amendment.

This decision is based on the analysis in the Environmental Assessment and the corresponding case file. Approval of this alternative constitutes an amendment to the Billings Resource Management Plan completed in 1984, and provides management guidance for this area.

The EA analyzed management for both the Sundance Lodge and Four Dances sites. A separate Decision Record for the Four Dances site has been issued.

The following resource management decisions will hereafter be applied to the Sundance Lodge site, as described under Alternative C, Preferred Alternative.

Air Quality–

- Activities will be conducted to preserve the Class II air quality designation.
- Prescribed burning will not occur when prevailing winds are expected to carry smoke toward Billings or Laurel. Burns will only be allowed during favorable smoke dispersal conditions with stable atmospheric conditions. This will limit the possibility of smoke settling in populated river valleys during air inversions.

Animal Damage Control–

- All ADC activities will be conducted using procedures approved by the the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), and will be coordinated with APHIS if necessary.

Cultural–

- A comprehensive cultural resources management plan will be developed.
- Cultural inventories will be completed in the vicinity of surface disturbing activities.
- Cultural resources will be evaluated for National Register of Historic Places eligibility.
- All treatment of cultural resources will be consistent with Sections 106 and 110 of the National Historic Preservation Act.
- Appropriate material for public education and interpretation of cultural resources will be developed in consultation with SHPO and appropriate tribes.

Fire Management–

- Appropriate management response to wildland fire will be aggressive fire suppression since the amount of federal ownership is relatively small and the area is surrounded by private holdings.
- Use of retardant would be avoided near the Clark's Fork of the Yellowstone River.
- Open campfires may be allowed in designated sites only.
- Prescribed fire, livestock grazing, and vegetative thinning could be used for hazardous fuel reduction.
- Fireworks will be prohibited.

Grazing–

- Livestock grazing may be authorized for the purposes of weed control, vegetative management to reduce hazardous fuels, or to provide short-grass habitat and habitat diversity for wildlife in designated areas. Grazing use must comply with Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for livestock grazing management.

Hazardous Materials and Waste Management

- No authorizations will be allowed for solid waste or hazardous materials disposal facilities on site.

Lands and Realty–

- ROWs, temporary use permits, and land use authorizations may be granted, issued, or renewed to qualified applicants if land uses are consistent with the approved management plan and the purpose of acquisition.
- Non-federal minerals and non-federal adjacent lands may be acquired from willing sellers.
- A parcel of BLM land (approximately 16 acres) south of the Clark's Fork may be exchanged for a parcel of private land (approximately 20 acres) within Sundance Lodge boundaries if other program guidance and appraisal conditions are met.
- A trespass prevention, detection and abatement program will be developed consistent with laws and land use planning. Beekeeping will require authorization.
- Sale, Recreation and Public Purposes Act Leases or conveyance, long-term leases for habitation, industrial uses, or military training purposes will not be allowed.

Minerals–

- The BLM does not have mineral rights for Sundance Lodge.
- In the case of future mineral development, the associated NEPA documents can address reasonable access routes, mining and/or drill locations, but cannot deny access.
- A surface use plan must be approved prior to permitting any surface disturbing activities on BLM administered lands.

OHV–

- OHV use (including bicycles) will be limited to administrative or authorized uses (which includes farming) or to make the area fully accessible.
- Snowmobiles will be prohibited.

Recreation–

- Sundance Lodge will be managed as a Special Recreation Management Area (SRMA) where recreation is the principle management objective. Greater recreation investment and more intense management will be required.
- The area will be day use only without a permit.
- The area will be available for environmental education programs.
- Developments may include a parking lot, fully accessible toilet and picnic facilities, a boat ramp, trails with interpretive signs, and a meeting facility that may be used for group meetings and environmental education.
- Sundance Lodge will not be available for paintball activities, discharging rifles and pistols, or use of permanent tree stands.
- Timing or locations may be specified for archery hunting, exercising pets off leash, and riding horses and bicycles on designated roads and trails.
- Use of shotguns, driving vehicles off highway, overnight camping, and competitive events will require approval from the Billings Field Manager.

Rights-of-Way Management–

- Sundance Lodge will be designated a ROW avoidance area.
- Any ROW that is authorized will have to be compatible with the purpose of the SRMA.

Soil and Water–

- Best Management Practices (BMPs), including the use of buffer strips, will be used to achieve the following objectives:
 - Maintaining soil productivity
 - Preventing or minimizing accelerated erosion
 - Preventing or minimizing flood damage
 - Protecting municipal and domestic water supplies
 - Maintaining, restoring, and enhancing watershed values.

Safety:

- A safety plan may be developed if appropriate.

Special Forest Products Management:

- The harvest or removal of dead and down material and designated trees for personal and commercial firewood use will be permitted only if the material creates a safety/fire hazard or obstructs a trail, road, or parking area.
- Where possible, dead/down material and snags will be preserved as important wildlife habitat features.

Vegetation:

- Riparian areas will be maintained for proper functioning condition.
- Farming may continue under the Cooperative Habitat Agreement.

Visual Resource Management:

- Any visual alterations must meet VRM Class III criteria.

Weeds:

- Treatments may include any appropriate combination of herbicide application, burning, grazing, and the use of insects or pathogens.
- Uses will be consistent with guidelines outlined in *Partners Against Weeds: An Action Plan for the Bureau of Land Management (1996)*.

Wildlife:

- A wildlife habitat management plan may be developed to maintain natural function of riparian areas and associated habitat for neotropical birds. The plan would include native vegetation restoration/ maintenance in previously farmed areas.
- Livestock grazing may be used in designated areas to achieve wildlife habitat and habitat diversity objectives.
- The agreement with Pheasants Forever and Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks may be renewed to maintain/improve wildlife habitat, provide funding for habitat improvements, weed control, and other improvements.

- Farming may be continued on cultivated areas and will be managed to benefit wildlife habitat. Native vegetation rehabilitation, wetland improvements, and food plots for wildlife may be developed.

Alternatives Considered, Including the Selected Management

Based on public involvement, resource management plan guidance, and interdisciplinary team analyses, the BLM developed and analyzed three management alternatives. This summary provides a cursory description of each alternative. Full development of each alternative is found in the “Alternatives” portion of the EA.

Alternative A (No Action Alternative)– The area would be managed according to current policies, guidelines, laws, regulations, or initiatives. No special designations or management direction would exist and management would be typical of that applying to most lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management.

Alternative B– Management would be directed by a combination of management initiatives and guidance, consistent with Special Recreation Management Area (SRMA) designation. Recreation would be the principle management objective. Sundance Lodge would have a Roaded Natural management direction. This alternative includes desired outcomes, allowable uses, and actions that were not part of the preferred alternative (Alternative C).

Alternative C (SRMA and Four Dances ACEC designation): Under this alternative, the primary desired outcomes included SRMA designation, enhanced recreation, and a “Rural Recreation” Recreation Opportunity Spectrum. In order to achieve these desired outcomes, certain allowable uses and actions were considered, including construction of a boat ramp, additional facilities, special events use, and a smaller range of allowable uses.

Rationale for the Decision

Given the proximity to population centers, the likely recreation uses, and anticipated level of activity, Alternative C will best meet the goals of providing access to the Clarks Fork River, providing additional recreation opportunities near Billings, and protecting wildlife habitat.

Based on the analysis, Alternative C provides access to the greatest number of recreation users while minimizing the impacts to unique and valuable natural resources. Alternative C is the most responsive to the general user seeking a dispersed recreation experience.

Resolution of Issues

This decision amends the Billings RMP to include the management described as Alternative C in the EA/Plan amendment. I have chosen Alternative C as the best resolution of issues raised during the planning process.

Issues that received almost universal support during the scoping process for Sundance Lodge included hiking trails, cross country skiing and running, and the construction of toilet and picnic facilities. A large number of respondents also spontaneously indicated that the area should be closed to OHVs.

Following the release of the EA, public comment was consistent with issues identified during scoping and considered in the EA. Thirteen comment letters addressed management at Sundance Lodge. The letters identified a range of issues, including differences or agreement with the management direction identified in Alternative C; and individual preferences for management.

Agency Comments

Several other agencies offered their expertise in the form of comments on the analysis, which I considered and incorporated into my decision. Montana Fish, Wildlife, & Parks (FWP); Billings/ Yellowstone City/County Planning Board; and the City of Laurel Planning Department all responded during the comment period.

Both the FWP and the City/County Planning Board indicated that beaver damage may become an issue in riparian areas. That consideration was added to Animal Damage Control in both the Alternatives and Anticipated Levels of Activity sections.

BLM also emphasized the option of issuing permits for first-time and disabled hunter use.

In response to visual concerns identified by the City/County Planning Board, BLM committed to burying communication sites and utility lines and emphasized that a site-specific NEPA document will be completed to consider effects of any future development at the site.

The chair of the City of Laurel Planning Department commented in support of the Preferred Alternative.

Public Involvement

The following list is abbreviated from the complete public participation list on pp. 47-49 of the Environmental Assessment. The following dates establish key points during public involvement specifically concerning Sundance Lodge, and may not include all progress within the agency on the document:

1999

May 11

Notice of Proposed Withdrawal and Opportunity for Public Meeting notice published in the Federal Register

Jun 11

Notice of Intent to Plan Affecting Two Tracts of Public Land in Yellowstone County, Montana published in the Federal Register

June 29

Public scoping Meeting held at MSU-Billings to discuss planning issues for the Four Dances Natural Area and Sundance Lodge Recreation Area

July 7

Public scoping meeting held in Laurel to discuss planning issues for the Four Dances Natural Area and Sundance Lodge Recreation Area

Aug 1

Deadline for the expression of issues, concerns, or alternatives on the Four Dances Natural Area and the Sundance Lodge Recreation Area as published in the Federal Register

Aug 9

Deadline for comments and requests for a public meeting as published in the Federal Register

Oct 14

Notice of Closure of Public Land to Certain Uses published in the Federal Register

2000

Oct 19

Project Leader briefed City/County Planner for Billings and Yellowstone Country about the ongoing plans and EA

2001

Jan. 3

Discussion between project leader and Billings City Parks Department on recreation use information at two city parks for the purpose of identifying anticipated level of activity.

Jan. 30

Letter mailed to individuals on mailing list explaining project status and indicating availability of alternatives for review at Billings Field Office.

Feb. 1

Preliminary alternatives available to the public at the Billings Field Office.

Feb. 12

BLM Management briefed regarding status of management plans and tentative schedule.

March 9

Met with agencies to review project status and preferred alternative.

April 26

News release issued announcing EA's availability.

Implementation:

The Billings Resource Management plan will be amended to incorporate this resource management guidance upon notification of the public. Examples of land use plan decisions that become effective immediately include desired outcomes, resource objectives, and designations. Upon approval of this land use plan amendment, subsequent implementation decisions may be put into effect by developing activity plans.

Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI):

Based on the analysis of the potential impacts contained in the attached environmental assessment and careful consideration of all public comments, I have determined that Alternative C will have no significant impact on the human environment. An Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) does not need to be prepared.

Support for the FONSI:

Noise, dust, and exhaust created by increased vehicle use will be small-scale, of limited duration, and quickly dispersed and will not cause measurable air quality impacts, contribute to cumulative effects, or reduce

visibility. The recommended mitigation to avoid air quality impacts on the Laurel and Billings non-attainment areas from prescribed burning will be adopted.

Any subsequently discovered archaeological resources which are considered eligible for the National Register of Historical Places (NRHP) will either be avoided or, in consultation with Montana State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO), a plan for mitigating the effects of the proposed actions will be formulated and implemented.

Alternative C will not cause disproportionately high or adverse effects on human health or environmental effects on low-income or minority populations, as provided under Environmental Justice considerations.

Since Sundance Lodge is within a 100-year floodplain, accepted floodproofing and other flood protection measures will be required to comply with Executive Order 11988 and to avoid long- and short-term adverse impacts associated with the occupancy and modification of floodplains. Examples of these measures are listed in the EA.

Effects on Native American religious concerns were considered at Sundance Lodge. No issues were identified during consultation with Crow tribal representatives.

Alternative C will not contribute to the unnecessary and irreversible conversion of prime or unique farmland to nonagricultural uses.

No impacts to threatened or endangered species are anticipated. Wetland development and wildlife food plots will improve wildlife habitat and forage. The context and intensity of impacts to wildlife habitat and populations would not be significant.

It is not expected that any future activities will generate effects in conflict with CERCLA or RCRA.

A Pesticide Use Proposal will be submitted and approved before any chemical or fertilizer treatments occur on site. Water provided by the BLM will conform to the provisions of the Safe Water Drinking Act of 1974.

Neither the Yellowstone River nor the Clark's Fork are designated Wild and Scenic Rivers and are not subject to the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act of 1968, as amended.

Management at Sundance Lodge will not be affected by any part of the Wilderness Act of 1964.

Development and activities associated with Alternative C will not cause a significant change in vegetation. To minimize the spread of noxious weeds, uses will be consistent with the guidelines outlined in *Partners Against Weeds: An Action Plan for the Bureau of Land Management*. Gravel and other fill materials used in recreation developments, including trail developments will be imported from weed-free sources.

Management techniques designed to minimize erosion, sedimentation, and turbidity would maintain the B-2 water quality classification.

Increased soil loss and sedimentation and turbidity in the water as the result of prescribed fire would be minimal, and will not cause significant impact to fish or fish habitat.

With Alternative C, the recreation experience will change from one characterized as Roaded Natural to Rural, which will still harmonize with natural environment and will provide an experience similar to what is available now. Although Alternative C represents the highest peak daily recreation use level, the sights and sounds of man would be less apparent because OHV use would be generally restricted.

Overall, the user's reaction to and perception of the recreation experience, including activities, setting, experience, remoteness, evidence of other humans, social setting, and managerial setting will not change substantially as a result of any management direction or

recreational developments completed under Alternative C

When evaluated against these criteria, no significant impacts to recreation opportunities or experiences will be anticipated.

Although increased use and surface disturbing activities may create visual changes, they will still meet the Visual Resource Management (VRM) Class III objectives to partially retain the existing character of the landscape. The changes in the line, form, color, or texture of the landscape would not change the overall visual quality of the area. The context and severity of the visual impacts will not result in significant impacts.

This analysis did not identify effects to the human environment that are considered highly controversial, highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.

These actions will not establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represent a discussion in principle about a future consideration.

These actions will not violate federal, state, or local laws or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.

Based on the analysis of management actions and anticipated activities both individually and cumulatively, I have determined that Alternative C will not constitute a significant environmental impact.

Recommended by:

Sandra S. Brooks

Sandra S. Brooks
Field Manager
Billings Field Office

5/2/02
Date

Approved by:

Mat Millenbach

Mat Millenbach
Montana/Dakotas State Director
Montana State Office

5/3/02
Date